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THE EARLY CREEDS OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH*

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In a booklet published in 1991, the late Archbishop Norayr Połarian of Jerusalem, like other churchmen before him, identified three liturgical texts as the primary credal confessions of the Armenian Church.¹ These are: (1) the brief confession found in the rite of baptism; (2) the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed following the Lections of the Divine Liturgy; and (3) the slightly lengthier confession placed at the beginning of the *Ordinal* (the *Žamagirk'* or the *Horologion* of the Armenian Church) and at times wrongly attributed to St. Grigor Tat'ewac'i, though Połarian comments neither about its derivation nor about its attribution. While he has no notes on the confession in the rite of baptism, he annotates with biblical references every statement in the second creed, and the third he annotates with biblical references and with few Armenian patristic sources among others. More on these sources shall be said shortly.

To keep this paper within manageable grasp and to give structure to my brief discussion, I shall use Połarian's booklet as a frame of reference. In no way should my presentation be considered a critique of the learned archbishop's elementary work, apparently aimed for the laity. The word „Early” in the title refers to the time before Tat'ewac'i (d. 1409).

To begin with, there is a scholarly consensus that creeds, such as the Apostles' Creed or the original Nicene Creed, evolved from the shorter baptismal confessions

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¹ Norayr Połarian (BOGHARIAN), *Hay Ekelec'woy Hawatoy Hanganaknerē* (The Creeds of the Armenian Church), New York: Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, 1991. For a fuller study see Yovsep' Gat'ērēan (Josephus CATERGIAN), *Hanganak hawatoy orov vari Hayastaneayc' ekelec'i* (The Creed of the Armenian Church) (Vienna: Mxit'arean Tparan, 1891); IDEM, *De fidei symbolo quo Armenii utuntur observationes. Opus posthumum* (Vienna: Typis PP. Mechitharistarum, 1893).

of the primitive church, just as the later creeds and confessions evolved from their immediate precursors.² What we have in the baptismal rite of the Armenian Church is one such primitive confession:

We believe in the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the annunciation by Gabriel, the birth of Christ, his baptism, suffering, crucifixion, his three-day burial, resurrection, divine ascension, his sitting at the right hand of the Father, his awesome and glorious second coming. We confess and we believe (trans. mine).³

Variants, with slight expansions between the phrases, are attested in some late manuscripts of the *Maštoc'* or the *Euchologion* of the Armenian Church.⁴

There can be no question about the dogmatic centrality of the „Nicene Creed,” more accurately the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (or its Athanasian version in vogue in the Armenian Church) recited following the Gospel reading during the Divine Liturgy and on other occasions, since the sixth century.⁵ Połarian divides it into 43 sections or statements as he annotates. There is nothing special, however, about his annotation of the text with biblical references. Such annotations exist in several other editions of the Creed published by churches where its liturgical recitation is traditional (traditionally divided into twelve articles of faith). What is lacking in his annotation is clarification of terms and of minor additions, such as the Athanasian addition in the statement on the Incarnation, aimed at Apollinarians and Do-

² See, e.g., John N. D. KELLY, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1972). Jaroslav PELIKAN and Valerie HOTCHKISS, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 4 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

³ Primary text in the *Maštoc'*, the *Euchologion* of the Armenian Church (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1977), p. 12. On the primitive features of the Armenian baptismal rite, see Gabriele Winkler, *Das armenische Initiationsrituale: Entwicklungsgeschichtliche und liturgievergleichende Untersuchung der Quellen des 3. bis 10. Jahrhunderts*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 217 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Orientale, 1982).

⁴ See, e.g., Jerusalem manuscript no. 1528, from early-eighteenth-century Bałěš: „And the priest shall say the following words, in this form: ‘We believe in the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, maker and creator of all creatures; the annunciation by Gabriel, the holy birth of Christ, the baptism of Christ, the lordship of Christ, his will [in taking up] the Cross, the death of Christ, his three-day burial, the glorious resurrection, the divine ascension of Christ, his sitting verily in the body at the right hand of the Father, and the second coming of Christ; the Holy Catholic Church, the teaching of St. Gregory the Illuminator; the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor; the assumption of Mary the Holy Bearer of God; the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead; the Cross and the Gospel of Christ.’ ‘Do you confess and believe?’” Text in Norayr Bogharian, *Grand Catalogue of St. James Manuscripts*, 11 vols. (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1966–1991) 5:277.

⁵ The practice was introduced in 473 by Peter the Fuller, Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch (in office intermittently 469–488), as a demonstration against the Council of Chalcedon (451), believed to mark a departure from the Christology formulated at the Council of Nicaea (325). In time, the custom of reciting the Creed during the Divine Liturgy became widespread in all ancient churches.

cetics: „...from whom He took body, soul and mind and everything that is in man, truly and not in semblance.”⁶ Moreover, Połarian should have invited attention to the medieval Armenian commentaries on the Creed, such as that by St. Nersēs of Lambron,⁷ at least to show how this Creed was historically understood in the Armenian Church—given the history of its interpretation in the East.⁸

As for the third selection, the credal confession at times wrongly attributed to Tat'ewac'i,⁹ Połarian divides it into 36 sections or statements and in the notes he refers to the *Girk' Harc'manc'* or the *Quaestiones*, the *magnum opus* of Tat'ewac'i – perhaps to substantiate the assumed authorship, and cites certain of the works of Xosrovik T'argmanič', the *Prayerbook* of St. Gregory of Narek, the *Encyclicals* of St. Nersēs Šnorhali, the *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* by St. Nersēs of Lambron, and the „Girk' Astuacabanakan or koč'i *Draxt C'ankali*” by Catholicos Lazar Č'ahkec'i (in office 1738–1751). The latter book, „A Theological Book Entitled *Desirable Paradise*” written in 1734, was intended by its author to be the definitive work in defense of the Armenian Church's dogma. Of the non-Armenian sources used in Połarian's annotation of the selection, there are but four references to the „Nicene Creed” (§§14, 15, 29, 32) and one reference to St. John of Damascus (§10).

I find Połarian's annotation of the third selection likewise wanting in the absence of citations from Armenian sources dating from before Xosrovik T'argmanič' (d. ca. 730). There is but one secondary reference to the ascription „one united nature” (*miaworeal mi bnut'iwn*) to the person of Christ, reflecting the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria: One is the nature of the incarnate Word” and that in a quotation from Šnorhali (§ 6). This citation in particular, according to Patriarch Ormanian, was to refute Eutychianism and to distance the Armenian Church from the heresy of blending or confusing (or mutating) the two natures of Christ.¹⁰ According to Archbishop Nersoyan, however, the citation was added in response to the Dominican missionary activities in Greater Armenia during the second half of the fourteenth century.¹¹ Nersoyan's assumption is based partly on the traditional, erroneous attribution of the creed to Tat'ewac'i. Whether with the clause „one united nature” or apart from it, the third creed seems to belong to a period soon after the beginning of the seventh century, for it is not found in the *Seal of Faith* (*Knik' Hawatoy*), a collection

⁶ See J.-P. MIGNE, *Patrologia Graeca*, 2:1230. In the sixth century the variant was current in the Syrian Church, from where it was adopted.

⁷ *Commentary on the Nicene Creed* (unpublished manuscripts).

⁸ Cf. Mesrop Aramian, "Yovhannēs Sarkawag's 'Concerning the Symbol of Faith of the Three Hundred and Eighteen [Fathers] at the Council of Nicaea'", *St. Nersess Theological Review* 4 (1999) 1-32.

⁹ For the text, see also the larger *Žamagirk'* or the *Horologion* of the Armenian Church, Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1915, pp. 177-78.

¹⁰ (Patriarch) Malachia ORMANIAN, *The Church of Armenia*, 3rd rev. ed. New York: St. Vartan Press, 1988, p. 107.

¹¹ See (Abp.) Tirán Nersoyan, *Armenian Church Historical Studies: Matters of Doctrine and Administration*, compiled with an introduction by Nerses V. Nersessian, New York: St. Vartan Press, 1996, p. 75.

of credal documents compiled probably by Yovhan Mayragomec'i in the days of Catholicos Komitas (in office 615–628).¹² In Połarian's annotations there is no reference to this compilation, or to earlier works like the catechism (*Vardapetut'iun*) and the homiliary (*Yačaxapatum*) traditionally attributed to St. Gregory the Illuminator, works excerpted in the *Seal of Faith* and utilized by successive hierarchs of the Armenian Church in dogmatic promulgations; no reference to the vast, albeit polemical literature produced over the centuries since Chalcedon, such as certain of the documents in the *Book of Letters* (*Girk' T'lt'oc'*); no reference to the pronouncements of Catholicos Yovhannēs Ojneč'i (in office 717–728), the likely author of the creed in question (more on this later), or to the *Demonstration* (*Bac'ayaytut'iwn*) of Sahak Vardapet Mřut (d. ca. 890), a response to Patriarch Photius I of Constantinople (in office 858–867 and 878–886), among others. Moreover, in his reference to St. John of Damascus (§10), Połarian follows but few late Armenian fathers who favorably cite Greek fathers from the post-Chalcedonian period (St. John of Damascus [ca. 675–ca. 750] is exceptionally revered in the Armenian Church for his stance against Islam and Iconoclasm). As a rule, Armenian fathers cite only those Greek fathers who thrived in the ante-Chalcedonian period, a subject to which I shall return shortly.¹³

The limitation to liturgical texts as a canon within the canon of dogmatic documents obviously does no justice to the amplitude of dogmatic theology in the Armenian Church. Dismissing the questionable dictum „Dogmas belong to religion; doctrines to theology”¹⁴, one is compelled to account for the numerous theological texts responsible for the rise of dogmas and those subsequent theological texts explicating the dogmatic and/or doctrinal development. Moreover, there are several compilations extracting a variety of dogmatic and/or doctrinal texts, such as the *Seal of Faith* (*Knik' Hawatoy*) and the later and shorter compilation known as the *Root of Faith* (*Hawatarmat* or *Armat Hawatoy*) attributed to the Cilician *vardapet* Vardan Aygekc'i (d. 1235).¹⁵ In such compilations, as a rule, the earliest Orthodox father

¹² Karapet Tēr-Mkrtč'ean (Tēr-Mkertchian), ed., *Knik' Hawatoy* (Seal of Faith) (Ējmiacin: Mother See Press, 1914; repr. Louvain: Peeters, 1974, under the title *Le Sceau de la Foi*; Antelias: The Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1998). For other arguments on the antiquity of this creed, see Gabriele WINKLER, *Über die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Armenischen Symbolums*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 262 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Orientale, 2000), pp. 203–211, where it is divided to 64 sections or statements. According to Winkler: „Aufgrund des Vokabulars bei der Menschwerdung in diesem *Credo* ist jedoch davon auszugehen daß es nicht vor Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts aufgekommen ist” (p. 204). For a complete word-index of the text, see Yarut'iwn P'alančian (Haroutiun Palandjian), *Knik' Hawatoy bnagrin bařac'ank* (Word-Index: *The Seal of Faith*) (Antelias: The Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1999).

¹³ The Armenian Church accepts the authority of the first three Ecumenical or Universal councils (Nicaea I, 325; Constantinople I, 381; and Ephesus I, 431), considering Chalcedon (451) and the later councils as „contrary to the received truth.” Consequently, the Armenian Church cherishes the writings of those Orthodox fathers who thrived before the ensuing controversy over Chalcedon.

¹⁴ ORMANIAN, *The Church of Armenia*, p. 99. The distinction between „dogma” and „doctrine” is hazy; moreover, theology is a common denominator in both.

¹⁵ *Girk' Hastatut'ean ew Armat Hawatoy* (Book of Affirmation and Root of Faith), Erevan: Erevan State University, 1998.

excerpted is St. Irenaeus, followed by the Cappadocian Fathers, the Alexandrine Fathers, and St. Cyril of Jerusalem; and of the Armenian fathers, St. Gregory the Illuminator, with lengthy quotations from the catechism known as the *Teaching of St. Gregory (Vardapetut‘iwn Srboyn Grigori)*¹⁶ and the homiliary entitled *Often Repeated Discourses (Yačaxapatum Čařk’)*.¹⁷

Neither of these two major works traditionally attributed to St. Gregory—the *Teaching* and the *Discourses*—could be ascribed to him unquestionably,¹⁸ for as Thomson and others have shown in their study of the *Teaching*, it incorporates some later sources.¹⁹ There is a scholarly consensus, however, that these works belong to

¹⁶ For an Eng. trans. of the catechism attributed to St. Gregory, see Robert W. THOMSON, *The Teaching of St. Gregory*, rev. ed., AVANT: Treasures of the Armenian Christian Tradition 1, New Rochelle: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2001; the Arm. text (*Vardapetut‘iwn*) is an integral part of Agat‘angēlos, *Patmut‘iwn Hayoc‘* (Aa 259–715); Arm. text: Agat‘angēlāy *Patmut‘iwn Hayoc‘*, Galust Tēr Mkrtč‘ean and Step‘an Kanayeanc‘, eds. (Tiflis: Martiroseanc‘, 1909; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1980); Eng. trans., Robert W. Thomson, *Agathangelos. History of the Armenians*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1976.

¹⁷ Arm. text: *Srboy Hōrn Meroy Eranelwoyn Grigori Lusaworč‘i Yačaxapatum Čařk‘ Lusa-work‘* (Often Repeated [and] Enlightened Discourses of Our Blessed Father Gregory the Illuminator), Aršak Tēr Mik‘elian, ed. (Ējmiacin: Mother See Press, 1894); and *Srboy Horn Meroy Grigori Lusaworč‘i Yačaxapatum Čařk‘ ew Alot‘k‘* (Often Repeated Discourses and a Prayer of Our Holy Father Gregory the Illuminator), Venice: S. Lazar, 1954. For a recent edition by Hakob K‘eōsēian, see *Matenagirk‘ Hayoc‘* ([Ancient] Armenian Authors), an ongoing series (Antelias: Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, 2003) 1:7–137. References are to this last edition.

¹⁸ For the text of another, minor work attributed—albeit wrongly—to St. Gregory, called *Harc‘umn ew patasxanik‘* (The Question[s] and Answers), confuting the former religion of the Armenians and thought to have been one of the sources utilized by Eznik in the 440’s, see Nicholas ADONTZ, "Le Questionnaire de Saint Grégoire l’Illuminisateur et ses rapports avec Eznik", *Revue de l’Orient chrétien* 25 [n.s. 5] (1925–1926) 309–57 (Arm. text: pp. 312–322); Levon S. Xač‘ikyan (Khatchikian), „Grigor Part‘evin veragruac ‘Harc‘umē’, orpes hay matenagrut‘yan eraxayrik“ (Le „Questionnaire“ attribué à Grégoire le Parthe, prémices de l’écriture arménienne), *Banber Matenadarani* 7 (1964) 301–330 (Arm. text: pp. 315–328), attributes it to Maštoc‘; reverting, however, to Adontz’s position in „Otaralezu hay grakanut‘iwně č‘orrord darum“ (Foreign-language Arm. Literature in the Fourth Century), *Patma-banasirakan handes* (1973/3) 27–51. For further improvements upon the text, see Martiros Minasian (Mardiros Minassian), „Kanovn srboyn Grigori Part‘ewi darjeal harc‘umn ew patasxanik‘ nora“ (Le Questionnaire de Saint Grégoire l’Illuminisateur), *Bazmavep* 139 (1981) 57–72, who attributes it to neither: „Grigor Part‘ewi kam S. Maštoc‘i veragruac ‘Harc‘umē’ ew Eznik Kołbac‘i“ (Le ‘Questionnaire’ attribué à Grégoire l’Illuminisateur ou a Mesrop Machtotz n’est pas une source d’Eznik), *Handes Amsorya* 85 (1971) 355–370, 463–482; 86 (1972) 73–94, 199–212, 347–354, 439–462; 87 (1973) 51–60). He sees it as an early canonical derivation from Eznik, to the point of utilizing it to correct textual corruptions in the latter—following Galust Tēr Mkrtč‘ean’s letter of October 25, 1911, to Nikolaï Marr (cited, 85:359–360).

¹⁹ THOMSON, *Teaching*, 41–49; Levon H. Ter-Petrosyan, „Grigor Lusaworč‘i Vardapetut‘yan asorakan abyurnerč“ (The Syriac Sources of G. L.’s *Teaching*), *Banber Matenadarani* 15 (1986) 95–109. In their introduction to the text in the series of (Ancient) Armenian Authors (*Matenagirk‘ Hayots‘*), Karēn Iwzbašian (Yuzbashyan) and Paruyr Muradian (Muradyan) invite attention to its early Georgian translation, where it is attributed to Hippolytus of Bostra (2:1291). The misplaced attribution could have arisen from the fact that Hippolytus of Bostra authored a similar catechism by way of questions and answers, a substantial fragment of which, on the Holy Trinity, survives in the dogmatic, anti-Chalcedonian collection of credal documents known as *Knik‘ Hawatoy* (Seal of

the circle of the Holy Translators of the early fifth century.²⁰ Regardless of their questionable attribution to St. Gregory, the linking of these works together and to St. Gregory cannot be arbitrary. The *Teaching* and the *Discourses* go hand in hand: the first, as catechism, is to prepare believers for baptism, and the second, as moral exhortation, is to prepare the newly baptized to live virtuously, as expected of a Christian, to reinforce commitment and to strengthen faith. To use biblical language, the former is „milk” for infants and the latter „solid food” for the mature.²¹ The words of the anonymous author at the beginning of the seventh discourse are noteworthy: „When wisdom increases with the creatures’ growth in age and they mature from childhood into perfect manhood, only then they could hear satisfactorily the words of truth” (7:1). Equally noteworthy are his words near the end of the twenty-first discourse: „I speak wisdom to the mature” (21:18).²² The homiliary is thus a sequel to the catechism. Their most obvious thematic connection is to be seen in their emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity: whereas the former begins and ends with emphasis that the Trinity is the most important doctrine (§§ 702–715), the latter begins with homilies on the Trinity (nos. 1–2:6) and abounds with references to „the Most Holy Trinity.” In fact, the first of these homilies is a credal confession, included in the *Knik’ Hawatoy* or *The Seal of Faith*.²³ The two works are invariably related; and since the *Teaching* was more readily attributed to St. Gregory because of its textual place in the *History of Agat’angełos* (§§ 259–715), so too were the *Discourses* attributed to St. Gregory. Or, as Arevshatyan thinks, just as several elements from Koriwn’s *Life of Maštoc’* were appropriated for the Illuminator by the pseudonymous author of the Agathangelian *History*, so were also these works of Maštoc’ appropriated for the Illuminator.²⁴ Be that as it may, the traditional attribution of these works to St. Gregory is explicable also on the grounds of their antiquity and the likelihood that they were inherited in an earlier form and then expanded

Faith [Karapet Tēr-Mkertch’ian, ed. (Ejmiacin: Mother See Press, 1914; repr. Antelias: The Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1998)], pp. 7–15), compiled probably by Yovhan(nēs) Mayravanec’i or Mayragomec’i in the days of Catholicos Komitas (in office 615–628). For more on the excerpt and the identity of its author, see Léon M. FROIDEVAUX (“Les Questions et Réponses sur la Sainte Trinité attribuées à Hippolyte, évêque de Bostra”, *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 50 [1962] 32–73), who discerns an ante-Nicene core in this excerpt on the Trinity.

²⁰ A mounting consensus ever since the pioneering work of Paul Vetter, on which see AREVSHATYAN, „Maštoc’ et les débuts de la patristique arménienne,” p. 310. On their pre-Chalcedonian date, see also the summary of scholarship in Levon H. TER-PETROSYAN, *Daser Hay Ekelec’akan Matenagrutyunic’ (E Dar)* (Lessons from Armenian Ecclesiastical Bibliography [5th Century]) (Soči: Armenian Diocese of Nor Naxijewan and Russia, 1993), pp. 22–23, 35–38.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; cf. 1 Peter 2:2.

²² „Zimastut’iwn xōsim ařkatareals,” Hom. 21:18; drawing on 1 Corinthians 2:6.

²³ *Knik’ Hawatoy*, pp. 18–22; the first homily is followed by 2:1–6, as an integral excerpt. There are five excerpts from the *Teaching*: §§ 402, 415, 491b–92, 469–70a, 459–66a. The *Seal of Faith* also quotes Agat’angelos, *History*, 850–885 (pp. 303–304). In her study of Armenian confessions of faith, Winkler cites the following sections of the *Teaching*: 259, 362, 364, 368–369, 377–382, 385, 387, 390–391, 408, 425, 446, 515, 592 (*Über die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Armenischen Symbolums*, p. 630).

²⁴ AREVSHATYAN, „Maštoc’ et les débuts de la patristique arménienne,” p. 310.

upon by succeeding generations of the Gregorid hierarchs down through St. Sahak, the great-great-great grandson of St. Gregory, a devotee of Patristic writings and patron of the Holy Translators; hence the more likely origin of the traditional attribution of these two works to St. Gregory. The antiquity of certain homilies in the *Yačaxapatum* is further attested by intermittently discernable indicators of an underlying Greek text. Moreover, the biblical quotations do not correspond with the extant Armenian Bible,²⁵ a further indication of the antiquity of the original text and of the likelihood of translation for the most part. We cannot but affirm the fifth-century, pre-Chalcedonian (451) date of these writings in their current form, thus allowing for the possible utilization of late fourth-century or even later sources in the composition of some parts and the redaction of others.²⁶ Some further internal evidence supporting such a date is found at the end of the twentieth homily in the *Yačaxapatum*: „For among the Persians and the Armenians nothing is greater than the Arsacid dynasty.”²⁷ The dynasty’s rule in Armenia ended in 428, with the Persian recall of the last Arsacid king, Artashēs or Artashir (reigned 422–428), upon the request of the Armenian tribal chiefs known as *naxarars*. This also led to the deposition of St. Sahak from the patriarchal office in that year. His death in 439 seems to mark the *terminus ad quem* for the compilation. Furthermore, the kind of monasticism advocated in the last, twenty-third homily in the *Yačaxapatum* seems to have been ratified at the Council of Shahapivan in AD 444.²⁸

The meaning of the adjectival compound *Yačaxapatum* is sufficiently clear even though the compound is a *hapaxlegomenon* (a word that occurs but once) in Classical Armenian. Literally, it means „often repeated” (cf. Gk. *polulalētos*). According to Malxasian, the term means „One who recounts [or] writes broadly and in detail, verbose.”²⁹ The meaning he gives, while close, is not altogether convincing when the term is used in conjunction with the noun *čařk’* („discourses,” „speeches,” or „homilies”). He then cites as example the title *Yačaxapatum Čařk’* with its attribution to St. Gregory the Illuminator, but without any further elaboration. Following the literal meaning of the compound, taken as an adjective in conjunction with the noun it qualifies, a preferred translation of *Yačaxapatum Čařk’* would be „Often

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Note Thomson’s source criticism of the *Teaching* (rev. ed., pp. 41–49). As for the *Yačaxapatum*, a thorough source criticism is needed.

²⁷ „Zi i Hays oč’ inč’ mecagoyn ew i Pars k’an zAršakuneats’ tohm,” Hom. 20:164. The Arsacids of Persia (Parthia) were overthrown by the Sasanians in AD 224; however, the dynastic continuity was maintained by the surviving Armenian branch.

²⁸ Note canon 15; in *Kanonagirk’ Hayoc’* (Canon Law of the Armenians), Vazgen Hakobyan, ed., 2 vols. (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1964–1971) 1:450–454. The canon quoted at p. 243 of the *Yačaxapatum* is not found in the *Kanonagirk’*.

²⁹ Step’an Malxasianc’, *Hayerēn Bac’atrakan Bařaran* (Arm. Explanative Dictionary) 4 vols. (Erevan: Petakan Hratarakč’ut’iwn, 1944–1945) 3:385. He seems to follow somewhat the *Nor Bařgirk’ Haykazeān Lezui* (New Dictionary of the Arm. Language), Gabriēl Awedik’ean et al., eds., 2 vols. (Venice: S. Lazar, 1836–1837; repr. Erevan: University of Erevan, 1979–1981) 2:318.

Repeated Discourses,” comparable to Arevshatyan’s translation of the title as „Discours fréquent.”³⁰ However rare, the Armenian title is not altogether odd; it is a fitting designation for repeatedly preached sermons of moral content. The repetitive use of such homilies in the Early Church is well attested, especially in the epitomes and the less systematically organized variety of compilations that reached their high point in the Byzantine period.³¹ It was customary to repeat moral speeches or homilies even when written by others—a point that opens up the whole question of attribution, authorship, and originality of the contents of the collection. This, however, is another subject for study.

Superseding the numerous confessional texts from the early centuries of Armenian Christianity, such as those in the *Seal of Faith*, and perhaps next to the liturgical confessions of faith, is the letter of St. Nersēs Šnorhali to the Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (reigned 1143–1180). While it draws on all three of the liturgical texts, it is characterized by such clarity in its statement of the faith that it has acquired near-canonical significance and a unique place in the dogmatic theology of the Armenian Church. I feel compelled to offer a short history of the letter and of the circumstances leading to its writing, before commenting on some of its contents.

Encouraged by the promising doctrinal reconciliation with the Latins, thanks to the Crusader presence in the East and the ever-increasing Armenian involvement with the Latin principalities,³² in 1165 Šnorhali initiated discussions concerning union of the Armenian and Greek churches. He met in Mamistra that year with the imperial governor, the *protostrator* Alexios Axouch, a wealthy Byzantine magnate and son-in-law of the Emperor Manuel.³³ Upon Alexios’ request, Šnorhali handed him a written statement of the Armenian faith, which Alexios himself was to present to the emperor.³⁴ In the first part of the statement he expounded the doctrine of the

³⁰ AREVSHATYAN, „Maštoc‘ et les débuts de la patristique arménienne,” p. 309.

³¹ The tradition of the necessity to repeat moral discourses is attested by Dio CHRYSOSTOM, *Oration* 17.1–11; cited by Abraham J. MALHERBE, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook*, Library of Early Christianity 4, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986, pp. 154–157. For more on the transmission of moral traditions, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians*, Library of Early Christianity 6, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986, pp. 61–64.

³² For the earlier dialogues with the Latins, culminating with the coronation of Levon as King of Armenia in 1199 (d. 1219), the English reader may consult the survey by Charles A. FRAZEE, “The Christian Church in Cilician Armenia: Its Relations with Rome and Constantinople to 1198”, *Church History* 45 (1976) 166–184 (some chronological errors are noticeable in the Armenian-Greek relations’ part of the survey).

³³ On this Byzantine noble family of either Persian or Turkic origin, see Alexander P. Kazhdan and Anthony Cutler, „Axouch” in A. P. Kazhdan et al., eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 1:239.

³⁴ For the text of this initial statement of faith, see Ěndhanrakan T‘ut‘k‘ S. Nersisi Šnorhalwoy (General Epistles of St. Nersēs the Gracious; hereinafter abbr. *General Epistles*), Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1871, pp. 87–107 (see also below, n. 44, for reference to a facsimile of an original, verbatim copy of the first part [pp. 87–93, 96–97], sent in 1246 by Catholicos Kostandin I Barj-erberdc‘i [in office 1221–1267] to Pope Innocent IV [in office 1243–1254]). For an Eng. trans. of the statement, see *The Profession of Faith of the Armenian Church by St. Nerses Shnorhali*, trans. with intro. and comment by Terenig Poladian (Boston: Baikar Press, 1941), pp. 33–46. On the various statements of faith by Šnorhali and their historical circumstances, see Małachia ORMANIAN,

Trinity in the Armenian Church. He then addressed every conceivable question the Greeks would have regarding the Armenian faith, explaining not only the reasons behind the differences in liturgical practices but also the Christological divide and that without any polemical attack on Chalcedon. He went so far as to consent that the confession of Christ as God and Man not only explains his essence united by the two natures, divine and human, but also defines it.³⁵ He offered a resolution to the Christological problem in the simplest terms: „Therefore, if ‘one nature’ refers to the indissoluble and indivisible union and not the confusion, and if ‘two natures’ stands for the unconfused, immutable and indivisible, both are within the bounds of Orthodoxy.”³⁶ In due course the emperor wrote to the Catholicos Gregory III (in office 1113–1166) indicating his willingness to act as a mediator of conciliation and asked the Catholicos to send his learned brother, Šnorhali, to Constantinople to explicate in person the dogma of the Armenian Church.³⁷ By the time the bearer of the imperial letter, Smbat, arrived in Hromklay, the See of the Catholicosate since 1149, the Catholicos had died and Šnorhali had succeeded him.

Short of traveling to Constantinople, Šnorhali wrote a three-part letter to the emperor.³⁸ In the first part he reassured of the desirability to end the separation of more than seven centuries and challenged the emperor to grasp the opportunity of these momentous times.³⁹ He called upon the parties to come prayerfully, with humility and readiness to recognize and to correct whatever might be shown to be erroneous in their faith. „If God wills that we converse with one another, let it not be as the master with his servants and the servants with their master, for you set our shortcomings before us, yet we do not dare tell you what appalls us in you.”⁴⁰ He concluded the first part with these words: „After all, Moses, the great prophet, learned with humility from Jethro; and David, the prophet and king, from Nathan: one, with his wisdom, had to receive counsel; and the other, rebuke for his mistakes.”⁴¹ To this part he appended an equally definitive statement regarding the doctrine of the Armenian Church, repeating in substance and in as simple words as possible much of what he had stated before.⁴² In the third part he explained the

Azgapatum (National History), 3 vols. (Beirut: Imprimerie Sevan, 1959–1961) 1.3:1383–1387, 1410–1413 (§§ 950–951, 968–969).

³⁵ *General Epistles*, pp. 96–97 (for a translation, see Poladian, *Profession of Faith*, pp. 40–41).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97 (trans. mine).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–109.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–120, 120–130, 130–143 respectively.

³⁹ He was also quick to remind of certain atrocities suffered by the Armenians at the hands of the Greeks: „... to this day, causing our people to distance themselves from you: the destruction of churches, the plundering of divine altars, the desecration of representations of Christ, the many torments endured by His servants, and accusations of all sorts, such as not witnessed even among the enemies of Christ to whom we are close. Such acts not only do not unite those who are separated but also separate those who are united.” *Ibid.*, p. 115 (trans. mine).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117 (trans. mine).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119 (trans. mine).

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 120–130.

different and unique liturgical practices of the Armenians, adding that what matters most is the purity of one's act emanating from the purity of one's faith. This is the essence of Orthodoxy, and far more important than the differences in dates of feasts and various observances.⁴³

Šnorhali's letter to Manuel soon became the best dogmatic expression of the Armenian Church's faith. When Pope Innocent IV (in office 1243–1254) requested a statement of the faith of the Armenian Church through his Franciscan emissary in Cilicia, Dominique d'Aragon, the Catholicos Kostandin I Barjérberdci (in office 1221–1267) had the central part of Šnorhali's first letter to Manuel copied verbatim (changing only the name of the addressee and that of the bearer of the document, and appending his own signature to it).⁴⁴ Moreover, Kirakos of Ganjak, the thirteenth-century Armenian historian, quotes the entire document in his *History*, giving it the validity of a *tome*.⁴⁵

With all his readiness, however, Šnorhali was not eager to accept any theological modification contrary to the tradition of the Armenian Church or for which there was no justification in that tradition.⁴⁶ And he probably found some solid counsel in

⁴³ In response, the emperor, with the blessing of the patriarchal synod, sent Theorianos, a renowned theologian and polemicist, in the fall of 1169 and again in the fall of 1171 for negotiations at Hromklay. An Armenian-born Orthodox bishop, John Atman (Arm. Uthman) of Philippopolis, acting as interpreter, accompanied the Greek theologian on his visits as the emperor's representative. Šnorhali's epistolary contains an imperial, introductory letter presented by Theorianos, in which his name appears with that of his companion, John (see *ibid.*, pp. 144–145; cf. *Patrologia Graeca* 133:120–121. John was the translator of the official Armenian letters sent to Byzantium; *ibid.* 133:213. For more on the notable Greek theologian, see Kazhdan, „Theorianos,” *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3:2069. As Ormanian observes, following *Patrologia Graeca* 133:121, the delegation arrived in Hromklay on May 15, 1170 [*Azgapatum*, 1.3:1420 = § 974]; so also Zekian, „St. Nerses Šnorhali en dialogue avec les Grecs,” p. 863). Not surprisingly, Theorianos kept a rather detailed record, in two parts, of his dialogues with Šnorhali (the *editio princeps* with Lat. trans. by Angelo Mai is in the series *Patrologia Graeca* 133:113–297; cols. 277–297 pertain to the dialogue with the Jacobites: „Theoriani Orthodoxi disputatio cum Armeniorum Catholico” [Disputatio I, cols. 120–212; Disputatio II, cols. 212–77]. The same Lat. trans., with some documentary omissions, is found also in Alexander BALGY, *Historia Doctrinae Catholicae inter Armenos* (Vienna: Typis Congr. Mechitharisticae, 1878), pp. 220–285 [Disputatio I, pp. 220–258; Disputatio II, pp. 259–285]. For the various earlier editions of Theorianos' account of the dialogues, see Zekian, „St. Nerses Šnorhali en dialogue avec les Grecs,” p. 864 n. 5). Each part, however, appears to be a later account, written as memoirs upon the author's return to Constantinople and aimed for the home audience (so thinks ORMANIAN, *Azgapatum*, 1.3:1421–123 = § 975). Whatever the intent of the moderately uncharitable record, in the Greek version of events we have a literary source somewhat comparable to certain letters in the epistolary of the illustrious Catholicos.

⁴⁴ See the facsimile of the original document, now in the Vatican (Archivio Segreto Vaticano: A Arm. I-XVIII-1804), in Claude Moutafian, *Roma-Armenia* (Vatican: Edizioni di Luca, 1999), p. 168 (no. VI. 54, described on p. 167); cf. *General Epistles*, pp. 87–93, 96–97. My thanks to Dr. Peter Halter of Marbach/Neckar, Germany, for bringing this document to my attention (references to the primary, secondary and corresponding sources are mine).

⁴⁵ Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*, Karapet A. Melik'-Öhanjanyan, ed. (Erevan: Arm. Academy of Sciences, 1961), pp. 121–147.

⁴⁶ He is quoted by Theorianos as having said during the second dialogue: „*Non haud sumus haeretici, sed orthodoxi per Christi gratiam, utpote a Sancto Gregorio illuminati, cuius doctrinas*

a major tractate by one of the most prominent Catholicoi of the eighth century who was also a staunch opponent of Chalcedon and of Greek liturgical peculiarities, the Catholicos Yovhannēs Ojnec‘i. In the latter’s tractate *Against the Phantasiastae* (*Ēnddēm Erewut‘akanac‘*), a heretical group whose extreme views about the incorruptible nature of the body of Christ approximate those of the Aphthartodocetae or Julianists,⁴⁷ we read the following: „Now it is patent that it is the inscrutable union, and not any mutation in the natures, that leads us to say ‘one nature’ of the Incarnate Word.” He then quotes Cyril of Alexandria’s dictum „One is the nature of the Incarnate Word” and adds: „I do not deny the perfections of the two natures in view of their union, and neither in view of the perfections of the two natures do I decline to acknowledge the perfection of the unity, but confess unity in immutability, and immutability in unity.”⁴⁸ Space does not allow further explication of the tractate, which constitutes a significant chapter in the theology of the Armenian Church. Suffice it to say that Ojnec‘i makes it clear that the doctrine of the „one nature” in the Armenian understanding is not to be unduly pressed, any more than the doctrine of the „two natures” by the others, for any thought about the divinity and humanity of Christ presupposes the inscrutable or mystical union of the „two natures” in His unique person or, as it is often called, the „one nature.”⁴⁹ Ojnec‘i’s constant dwelling on Cyril of Alexandria’s dictum compels the suggestion that he was the author of the third liturgical confession discussed above, and its interpretation by him in the aforementioned tractate constitutes his compromise for a position between the extreme Monophysites or Julianists on the one hand and the Chalcedonians on the other. Furthermore, the third liturgical confession discussed above must have been formulated at a council (such as the one convened by Ojnec‘i at Dwin in 720), for in the Armenian Church—as in all other traditional churches—cregal pronouncements have to be of conciliar origin and not of individual *vardapets* or theologians of the

traditionesque retinemus.” *Patrologia Graeca* 133:245/246; cf. BALGY, *Historia Doctrinae Catholicae inter Armenos*, p. 266. The Teaching of St. Gregory has no specific doctrine regarding the „two natures”; such terminology was as yet unknown to fifth-century Armenian theology.

⁴⁷ The treatise *Yalags anapakanut‘ean marmnoyn K‘ristosi* (On the In incorruptibility of the Body of Christ) by Step‘anos Bishop of Siwnik‘ (Step‘anos Imastasēr, the „Philosopher”), a contemporary to Ojnec‘i, is an example of such theology in some Armenian quarters at the time (Arm. text ed. by Galust Tēr Mkrtč‘ean, *Ararat* 35 [1902] 368–400; for others in the district of Vaspurakan, see the editor’s opening note). Apart from their being contemporaries and having either studied with the same teacher(s) or relied on identical sources, possibilities that account for common elements obtained in certain liturgical commentaries attributed to them, the two churchmen appear to have been in different theological camps.

⁴⁸ Arm. Text: *Madenagrut‘iwnk‘ Yovhannu Ojnec‘woy* (The Writings of John of Ojun) (Venice: S. Lazar, 1833), pp. 48–80. Eng. trans. by Leon Arpee, „Appendix II” in his *Armenian Christianity from the Beginning to Our Own Time* (New York: The Arm. Missionary Assoc. of America, 1946), pp. 325–354; the quotation is from pp. 329–330. E. Arm. trans. by Vazgen Hambarjumyan, *Hovhannes Ojnec‘i, Erker* (H. O.: Works) (Erevan: Anahit, 1999), pp. 69–124. The name of Ojnec‘i was invoked by Theorianos during the first dialogue, and that with a twist; see *Patrologia Graeca* 133:208; cf. BALGY, *Historia Doctrinae Catholicae inter Armenos*, p. 255 and note.

⁴⁹ Cf. Arpee’s introduction to the tractate, *Armenian Christianity*, p. 325; so also Šnorhali’s letter to the emperor and to the patriarchal synod following the first meetings with Theorianos, *General Epistles*, p. 149.

Church. It was Šnorhali's discernment of Ojneč'i's compromising position at Dwin that propelled his seeming concession to the Greeks. Šnorhali argued repeatedly that both Greeks and Armenians accepted Cyril's terminology at the Council of Ephesus, and that there is no reason therefore for the churches to disagree on Christology.⁵⁰ It is this aspect of his Christological heritage, among other theological postulates, that Šnorhali passed on as a legacy to his immediate successors.⁵¹

The question as to whether the Catholicos speaks for the Armenian Church remains an issue. „St. Nersēs Klayets'i [Šnorhali] would not decide on doctrinal matters without submitting them to the bishops of the Church in council.”⁵²

Finally, some attention must be directed to the informal creeds or confessional texts found near the end of several ancient documents of Armenian authorship. Employing a literary commonplace, certain medieval authors conclude their major works with gratitude to the Almighty or to the Most Holy Trinity—a colophonic epilogue amounting to a personal confession of faith.⁵³ However personal, these

⁵⁰ Cyril's cover letter to Nestorios, sent to him in 430 with the condemnation decrees of both the Synod of Rome and the Synod of Alexandria, is crucial for a contextual understanding of his Christological terminology. „This letter, which epitomized Cyril's faith, was formally approved by the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451, after Cyril's death).” See „Cyril, St. (d. 444), Patr. of Alexandria,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Frank L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 369.

⁵¹ *General Epistles*, pp. 181–199, especially p. 196; see also Aršak Tēr-Mik'elian, „Mijin dareri kat'ulikosneri jgtumnern ekelec'akan xalafut'ean hamar” (The Efforts of the Medieval Catholicoi for Ecclesiastical Peace) *Ararat* 26 (1893) 25–48, 129–145, 236–253, 404–418, 507–523, regarding the letters of the Catholicos Gregory IV Tlay (in office 1173–1193). As regards the first of these, Levon Zekiyan observes that it mentions the son of Manuel, Alexios, who was born in 1169, and is therefore to be attributed not to Gregory III (in office 1113–1166) but to Gregory IV Tlay (in office 1173–1193), the successor of Šnorhali („St. Nersēs Šnorhali en dialogue avec les Grecs: Un prophète de l'œcuménisme au XII^e siècle,” in *Études arménienes / Armenian Studies: In Memoriam Haig Berbérian*, Dickran Kouymjian, ed. [Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986], p. 863 n. 2). The same legacy is to be seen in the efforts of St. Nersēs of Lambron (1153–1198, the son of Šahanduxt, daughter of Šahan, an older brother of Šnorhali), the tireless Archbishop of Tarsus, especially in his *Synodal Discourse* delivered at the Synod of Hromklay in 1179. The following paragraph from the *Discourse* sums up the issue(s): „However, while we attribute divinity to the unique Christ, they [i.e., the Chalcedonians], since they introduce the expression ‘nature’, make evident the stability of the essence, and while we attribute humanity to Him, they again, using the term ‘nature’, confirm clearly the human essence, and in these terms, they, as we, believe integrally in His unity, without leaving us reason to oppose them, if our examination is unprejudiced. For it is the same thing to say that Christ is God and Man, and to speak about two natures, or rather, the former formula expresses not only the essence clearly, but also the definition of the essence; while the latter expresses only the essence, without its definition. Therefore, it is evident that whoever confesses God and Man confirms the one and the other nature in only one person. The real evil is, on the other hand, to bring the division into the question of person, instead of making it perfectly clear. We are far from that, both they and we. That was Nestorius's heresy for which he was damned by the Church.” Trans. (Abp.) Mesrob Ashjian, *St. Nerses of Lambron: Champion of the Church Universal* (New York: The Armenian Prelacy, 1993), p. 77.

⁵² On this subject, see Nersoyan, *Armenian Church Historical Studies*, p. 220.

⁵³ One of the most expressive of such personal confessions of faith belongs to the great-great-grandfather of Šnorhali, Grigor Magistros (ca. 990–1059). It marks the end of his poem reducing

confessional passages are usually informed and inspired by the collective expression of the Church's faith, and liturgical nuances are often detected in them. Indeed, many liturgical texts are intrinsically credal, for they tend to crystallize broad theological truths for the worshiping public.

Nonetheless, the three primary, liturgical dogmas remain the immovable pillars of the Armenian Church's credal tradition, amplified in the above-discussed sources. There are, to be sure, other sources of dogmatic significance; for among the more ancient texts of revered antiquity, some have inevitably acquired a distinctive place as important vehicles for the teaching of the Church.⁵⁴

WCZESNE WYZNANIA WIARY KOŚCIOŁA ARMEŃSKIEGO

Streszczenie

Artykuł Abrahama Teriana⁵⁵ dotyczy trzech wyznań wiary używanych do dziś w Kościele armeńskim. Zwięzłe przedstawia dwa najstarsze z nich: (1) krótkie *Credo* stosowane w obrębie chrztu, stanowiące jedno z pierwotnych wczesnochrześcijańskich armeńskich wyznań wiary; (2) *Credo* nicejskie, które, podobnie jak w Mszy łacińskiej, jest recytowane w liturgii armeńskiej po czytaniach liturgicznych, ale nieco różni się od wyznania nicejsko-konstantynopolitańskiego.

Główną uwagę Abraham Terian poświęca jednak trzeciemu, najdłużejemu wyznaniu wiary, które jest używane w armeńskiej *Liturgii Godzin* oraz podczas święceń kapłańskich, i jest tradycyjnie przypisywane Grzegorzowi Tatewaci (zm. 1409). Autor dowodzi, że jest ono wcześniejsze, zostało sformułowane zapewne na synodzie w Dwinie w 720 r. (w Kościele armeńskim, jak we wszystkich tradycyjnych Kościółach, orzeczenia dotyczące *Credo* musiały pochodzić z ustaleń

the Bible to some thousand lines of epic verse: *Tałasac‘ut‘iwnk‘ Grigori Magistrosi Pahlawun-woy* (The Epic Poetry of G. M. P.) (Venice: S. Łazar, 1868), pp. 1–79 (lines 932–946). See also the end part of *Yovhannēs Vardapeti Erznakac‘woy Asac‘uac Nerbołakan Govesti i Surb Lusaworič‘n Hayoc‘ Grigo-rios* (Panegyric Recited in Praise of St. Gregorios the Illuminator of the Armenians by Yovhannēs Vardapet Erznakac‘i), in *Hovhannes Erznakac‘i, Bank‘ č‘ap‘av* (Y. E.: Words in Verse), Armenuhi Erznakac‘i Srapyan, ed., Hay K‘narergut‘yun Matenašar (Erevan: Sovetakan Groł, 1986), pp. 123–199, *inter alia*; Eng. trans. in Abraham TERIAN, *Patriotism and Piety in Armenian Christianity: The Early Panegyrics on St. Gregory*, AVANT: Treasures of the Armenian Christian Tradition 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press / St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2005), pp. 79–158.

⁵⁴ For a list of these texts, the reader may consult the „Armenische Quellen” in Winkler's *Über die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Armenischen Symbolums*, pp. 625–631. For a more-or-less fixed list of the authoritative works, see Abel Otlugean (Oghlukian / Manougian), „Hamačot aknark Hay Ekelec‘woy vardapetakan astuacabanut‘ean grakanut‘ean” (A Brief Survey of the Dogmatic Literature of the Armenian Church) *Ganjasar* 4 (1993) 45–71.

⁵⁵ Abraham Terian – światowej sławy znawca wczesnochrześcijańskich dziejów Armenii, profesor armeńskich studiów patrystycznych i dziekan w St. Nersess Armenian Seminary w New Rochelle w stanie Nowy York, redaktor naczelny znanego czasopisma teologicznego *St. Nersess Theological Review*.

synodalnych, a nie od indywidualnych *vardapetów* czy teologów). Odzwierciedla też ono poszukiwany w tym czasie kompromis między teologią skrajnych monofizytów albo julianistów z jednej strony oraz zwolenników soboru chalcedońskiego z drugiej.

Oprac. ks. Józef Naumowicz